Aftermath: Women's Organizations In Postconflict Rwanda

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Preface

As part of its ongoing studies on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the societies ravaged by civil wars, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) undertook a multicountry assessment of gender issues in postconflict societies. The assessment concentrated on three sets of questions:

- What has been the impact of intrastate conflicts on women? How did these conflicts affect their economic, social, and political roles and responsibilities? What are the major problems and challenges facing women in these societies?

- What types of women's organizations have emerged during the postconflict era to address the challenges women face and to promote gender equality? What types of activities do they undertake? What has been their overall impact on the empowerment of women? What factors affect their performance and impact?

- What has been the nature and emphasis of assistance provided by USAID and other donor agencies to women's organizations? What are some of the major problem areas in international assistance?

The purpose of the assessment was to generate a body of empirically grounded knowledge that could inform the policy and programmatic interventions of USAID and other international donor agencies.

CDIE sent research teams to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda. These teams conducted in-depth interviews with key informants, reviewed literature, and conducted fieldwork. They prepared comprehensive reports, which were reviewed by USAID and outside scholars.

This paper, written by Catharine Newbury and Hannah Baldwin, examines the role that women's organizations have played in addressing gender issues arising out of conflict and transition in postgenocide Rwanda. I am grateful to the authors for their insightful analysis.

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Introduction

This report forms part of USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) multicountry evaluation of gender issues in postconflict societies. In particular, this study focuses on the role that women's organizations have played in addressing gender issues arising out of conflict and postconflict transition in postgenocide Rwanda. The field research for the report took place over four weeks in May and June 1999. A researcher with experience in gender and transition settings and a political scientist with 30 years of experience working on Rwandan issues conducted the research under the auspices of USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives and CDIE as part of a dual evaluation and study exercise. Interviews were conducted with local government officials, organization members, elected women leaders, project beneficiaries, local and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), donor agencies, and ministry officials. The team also collected documents, records, and other publications not available in Washington.

1. Women's Organizations In Postconflict Rwanda

The war and genocide in Rwanda during the first half of the 1990s shattered the dense social ties upon which women, both rural and urban, had relied in the past. In particular, these conflicts had a devastating effect on women's organizations, destroying their physical infrastructure and decimating their human resources. Many members and leaders were killed, while others fled into exile. Those who survived were left destitute, fearful, and alone. Yet in the aftermath of the conflicts, women's organizations, both new and old, took a leading role in efforts to rebuild the country. Offering a range of services, these groups helped women reconstruct their lives through emergency material assistance, counseling, vocational training, and assistance with income-earning activities. In addition, many organizations provided a space where women could reestablish social ties, seek solace, and find support.

The rapid proliferation of Rwandan women's organizations during the second half of the 1990s seems nothing short of remarkable. How was this possible, in the shattered social terrain of postgenocide Rwanda? What explains the large number of groups? What is the nature of these groups, and how have the activities of women's organizations changed as a result of the conflicts?

This paper examines the nature, roles, and impacts of women's organizations in postconflict Rwanda. Specifically it discusses the various factors that contributed to their emergence in postgenocide Rwanda, the wide range of activities they undertake, and the factors affecting their performance. It also discusses the role of the international community.

Reemergence of Women's Organizations

After the war and genocide of 1994, most women in Rwanda found themselves in desperate circumstances. Those who had survived the conflicts faced not only economic hardship but also social isolation. Their communities had been shattered and dispersed, and the men on whom they had depended were dead or had fled. Women still had to confront daily issues of survival—how to find housing when so many homes had been destroyed; how to feed and clothe themselves and their surviving children, as well as other relatives or orphans they had taken in; and how to deal with the debilitating traumas, both physical and psychological, of the horrors they had seen and experienced.

It was in this context of severe crisis, where the state lacked the means to meet critical needs, that women began to seek ways of cooperating to confront common problems. Groups of women formed in rural areas, building on previous rural associations that had provided economic and social support to their members. In postconflict Rwanda, many of these organizations grouped together women of one ethnic group—either Hutu or Tutsi. But in some areas, multi-ethnic associations involving both Hutu and Tutsi reemerged. Recognizing their need to live together again and to find ways

of supporting themselves through collaborative activities, Hutu and Tutsi women sought to overcome the mistrust spawned by the war and genocide.

In Kigali, the capital, women who had participated in national women's organizations before 1994 started to meet. They talked and offered each other mutual support, while voicing their concerns about the desperate conditions facing so many women and children. They then began to seek ways to meet these needs. Joined by Rwandan women who had returned to the country from exile, they began to rebuild organizations grouped within Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, a preexisting umbrella organization of women's associations. At the end of 1994, they drafted a "Campaign for Peace" as a means of addressing Rwanda's postgenocide social and economic problems. This program focused particularly on the critical needs of Rwandan women and proposed ways of involving women in efforts to promote overall reconstruction and reduce social tensions.

A second factor contributed to the growth of women's organizations at this time: Rwanda's tradition of vibrant organization activity. In the early postcolonial period, official policies of Rwanda's First Republic had supported social centers (*foyers sociaux*) for women in each prefecture.[1] These foyers sociaux, focused mainly on the needs of rural women, also provided opportunities for leadership to the educated young women who staffed them.[2] Later, beginning in the late 1970s during Rwanda's Second Republic under Juvénal Habyarimana, grass-roots organizations, cooperatives, and NGOs grew in number, assisted by church-related groups as well as by increased funding for rural development in Rwanda from international NGOs and other donors.[3] A study conducted in the mid-1980s showed that most of the rural groups surveyed devoted at least some of their activities to social services for women and children (health and nutrition) and that some groups provided training, education, and rural *animation* for women. Significantly, however, few groups gave much attention to women's agricultural work—the roles of women as producers.[4] A tally of 1,457 organizations in 1986 showed that 493 of them (or about one third) were women's socioeconomic groups, and 143 were registered as women's NGOs. These groups sought to bring more attention to the conditions women faced and the need for women's involvement in development.[5] Such proliferation of associations, growing out of earlier experiences with cooperatives, NGOs, and self-help groups, was fueled by three developments: the decline of state social services (linked with the economic crises of the period, which created a greater need for social safety nets); political liberalization; and increased external support for organizations.

A third factor in the reemergence of women's organizations in Rwanda after 1994 was support from the international community.[6] Rwanda received large quantities of emergency aid after the genocide, and this aid had a major impact, even if it was insufficient to meet all needs. Some bilateral and multilateral donors, influenced by the lobbying of Rwandan women's groups and leaders, by the postgenocide government, and by expatriates convinced of the importance of gender, paid special attention to the needs and roles of women. Donor resources established a supportive context for the renewed growth of women's organizations at the grass-roots level, and donor support was also essential to the rebuilding of initiatives of Rwandan women's organizations at the national level. Overall, the effects of these activities were positive and important to Rwanda's reconstruction. Aided by donors, some national associations were able to undertake especially ambitious projects. However, they did not always have sufficient administrative capacity to implement these effectively.

Finally, the policies of Rwanda's postgenocide government constitute a fourth factor encouraging the reemergence of women's organizations after the genocide. The Ministry of Gender and Promotion of Women's Development (Migeprofe, formerly Migefaso)[7] supported women's organizations by establishing a ministry representative in each prefecture and commune; these officials (who were usually, but not always, women) worked alongside and placed pressure on local government authorities to bring attention to women's concerns. The results were impressive. A 1997 study estimated that in each of Rwanda's 154 communes there were an average of about 100 women's organizations—or a total of more than 15,400 groups. The study attributed this growth to both government policy and outside aid organizations that encouraged women to form such organizations.[8] An added impetus came from the local level, where commune authorities often distributed garden plots in drained marshes to associations (but not to individuals).

Thus, the urgency of women's needs, the tradition of past association activity in the country (which had given some women experience in leadership), and government

and donor support were all important for the reemergence of women's organizations in Rwanda after 1994. Yet, each of these supportive factors also entailed contradictions, as discussed in section 3. Emergency relief was not always well-planned; dependence of associations on external support deepened, and some associations became overextended. Moreover, dovetailing the structures and personnel of earlier associations with the concerns and priorities of new groups established in Rwanda after the genocide created certain obstacles. Meanwhile, both the government and external donors exerted considerable influence over what women's organizations were able to do and how they did it, particularly at the national level. Therefore, the agendas and access to resources of women's organizations were seldom autonomous.

Nature of Women's Organizations

After the genocide, women's solidarity was important both among those who stayed in the country and among those who fled to the camps. Within Rwanda, these groups served as essential support and therapeutic networks for women who had experienced horrors. Those who fled often had suffered as well, and in the refugee camps they reestablished networks to provide mutual support—in receiving childcare, in gaining access to necessary resources, and in discussing the genesis of conflicts and possible avenues to peace. In fact, throughout this period of turmoil, women's groups provided the country one of its few enduring social continuities. However, despite substantial similarities in the characteristics of women's organizations in post-1994 Rwanda, compared with those of the period before, there were also important differences. Two of these are discussed in this section: the noticeable increase in the number of these groups, both local associations in rural and urban areas and national women's organizations, and the expanded range and scope of activities undertaken by them. A third area of difference, the contribution of such organizations to women's political participation, will be discussed later.

Although precise information on the number of grass-roots women's organizations in postgenocide Rwanda is not available, it is clear that by 1999 they were many—an average of 100 per commune—and that they were contributing not only to rural women's economic advancement but also to their empowerment.[9] In rural areas, the effectiveness of grass-roots organizations is often enhanced by their involvement in larger umbrella groups, which provide technical assistance and material support to the member associations.[10] At the national level, older associations resumed their activities after the war and genocide, and new ones were created. As in the late 1980s and early 1990s, these groups proliferated in response to crisis conditions, although the situation after the genocide was much more severe. Again, as before, this growth occurred in a context where the state lacked the means to meet critical needs, while external donors provided resources to encourage the development of associations.[11]

Although grass-roots organizations in the country were numerous in 1999, Rwandan women's organizations operating at the national level were, understandably, more limited in number—an estimated 50 associations. Of these, a majority were members of the Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe collective. Expanding from a base of 13 member NGOs in the early 1990s, Pro-Femmes had almost tripled in size to incorporate a total of 35 NGOs by the end of 1996.[9] With this growth came a greater diversity in the types of associations. Included in Pro-Femmes since 1996 are older women's organizations that had existed in Rwanda before the genocide, such as Duterimbere, Association des Guides du Rwanda, and Haguruka; organizations that had been founded by women in exile from Rwanda, such as Amaliza, Benishyaka, and Benimpuhwe; and new associations created to deal with the aftermath of the conflicts, such as Avega, Asoferwa, and Association des Femmes Chefs de Familles.

The member associations of Pro-Femmes can also be categorized in terms of their particular objectives. One type provides assistance to women of one or more particular categories—for example, widows, orphans, women caring for orphans, girls, and rural women. A second type emphasizes a particular form of activity or profession and makes its services available to women in general—often with an emphasis on the needy and vulnerable. Examples of the first type include Avega Agahozo, which assists widows of the genocide, and the Association des Femmes Chefs de Familles, which helps female heads of households. Examples of the second type include Haguruka, which does legal advocacy for women, and Duterimbere, which makes microcredit available to women.

The literature on women's associations in Africa notes a tendency for urban-based groups to mirror existing

social cleavages between educated elite women and poor rural women. Indeed, for a number of cases elsewhere in Africa, studies have shown that national women's organizations often do more to promote the social status and well-being of the urban women who staff them than to address the most pressing concerns of the rural majority.[12] One might well ask, then, to what extent national women's groups in Rwanda serve simply as an arena for educated elite women to promote their own interests. It is true that many Rwandan women's organizations, now as in the past, provide jobs and a platform for elite women. It is not uncommon for the leaders of these groups to have connections of some type with politically prominent people.

Clearly, these organizations serve as a training ground on which women can acquire leadership skills and build networks that position them for participation in other activities in the public sphere. Yet the stated goals of most groups are to assist vulnerable women and promote their empowerment. To what extent have these goals been achieved? That is a more complicated question, requiring information that goes beyond the reports and evaluations produced by the associations themselves. An assessment of this sort would require a more in-depth study than was possible for the present analysis. It is worth noting, though, that however much the actual achievement of their goals might fall short, most of these women's associations are clearly meeting real, urgent needs. This is recognized by a broad spectrum of Rwandan officials and expatriates involved in reconstruction in Rwanda. Criticism, when heard, tends to focus on administrative shortcomings and accounting problems, on the heavy dependence of these groups on external aid, or on the seeming multiplication of (and possible competition among) national groups whose goals and projects sometimes appear to overlap.

It is notable that although most of the member associations of Pro-Femmes maintain an office in Kigali, many actually conduct a significant part of their activities in towns and rural areas outside the capital.[13] But there is significant variation in the size and capacity of these groups to reach out. Only a minority of the member associations of Pro-Femmes command sufficient resources to pursue truly ambitious projects. This variation in size, resources, and capacities among the member organizations can be attributed in part to longevity. For example, two of the oldest NGOs, Réseau des Femmes and Haguruka, are also among the strongest institutionally. Each of these organizations has its own building, is staffed with competent personnel, and carries out important programs. Both have attempted to extend their activities to rural areas.

Duterimbere, a well-established association focused on helping women obtain credit, had been one of Rwanda's most visible and respected women's organizations in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But in the period following the genocide, this group was plagued with financial mismanagement and lost credibility with donors. After conducting a critical self-study and instituting policies to address these problems, Duterimbere appeared by mid-1999 to have regained strength and purpose as a national women's NGO offering important programs to assist women in need of credit.[14]

Longevity, however, is not the only indicator of strength. One of the largest and most active women's organizations in Rwanda today is Avega Agahozo, founded in January 1995 to assist widows who survived the genocide. Aided by substantial funding from donors, the group had grown to about 10,000 members by 1999.[15] Another postgenocide organization with impressive resources is Association de Solidarité des Femmes Rwandaises (Asoferwa). Founded in September 1994 to assist widows, single mothers, and orphans, this group had grown to more than 1,500 members by 1999. With 40 paid employees, many of them social workers, Asoferwa has been able to provide a variety of social services in different parts of the country, including psychosocial counseling for young people in prison. The association is particularly proud of having built a model village at Ntarama, with assistance from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and other donors.[16]

By contrast, Seruka is an example of an association that despite its relative longevity, commands only limited resources. Established in 1991, with the late Agathe Uwilingiyimana as one of its founders, the group assists female heads of household, orphans, and other vulnerable groups. With its main emphasis on rural areas, Seruka has sponsored programs to help women achieve food security, work together in local organizations, and promote peace and national reconciliation. It has also provided microcredit assistance to urban and rural women to help them undertake income-generating activities. Like many other associations, however, Seruka suffered severe setbacks during the genocide.[17] With help

from donors, the group has been able to rent office space and recommence its activities. But in 1999, this association of more than 2,000 members was struggling to continue its programs, with much more limited resources than groups such as Avega Agahozo or Asoferwa.[18]

The organizations grouped in Pro-Femmes are among the most visible advocating women's concerns. Other national organizations, not members of Pro-Femmes, are led by women and are working on women's issues. These groups may be fairly new (and thus have not yet joined Pro-Femmes), or they may have independent sources of external funding so that they do not need Pro-Femmes support. One such group is the Forum for African Women Educationalists/Rwanda (FAWE), which sponsors programs that encourage girls to continue their education.[19] In addition to the many women's organizations in Rwanda, there are mixed associations with women leaders and a gender component. The activities of such groups complement (and are complemented by) the work of women's organizations.[20]

Activities of Women's Organizations

If the number of women's organizations in Rwanda grew significantly in the aftermath of the genocide and war in Rwanda, so did the scope of their activities. The most prominent example of this shift was the Campaign for Peace proposed by Pro-Femmes.[21] In promoting this program, Pro-Femmes contributed significantly to ongoing discussions among Rwandan associations, the postgenocide government, and donors on the importance of targeting relief efforts to help women and on how these efforts could be carried out.[22] Putting forward a blueprint for "a process of reconstruction of the social fabric," the Pro-Femmes' Campaign for Peace emphasized four main goals:

- Encourage a culture of peace
- Combat gender discrimination
- Promote socioeconomic reconstruction
- Reinforce the institutional capacity of Pro-Femmes and its member associations

To achieve these goals, Pro-Femmes and its member groups proposed programs that would promote respect for human life; tolerance, collaboration, and mediation; and open discussion and negotiation to resolve conflicts, rather than the use of violence. The Campaign for Peace also sought to increase the involvement of Rwandan women in resolving national problems, including those of refugees, returnees, and survivors, and to assist women in taking a more prominent role in income-earning activities so they could improve their socioeconomic status. Finally, the campaign called for greater participation by women in national, regional, and international efforts to promote peace. [23]

These and other activities of associations in post-1994 Rwanda built on the past experience of women's organizations. But given the nature of the crises to be addressed, some activities were quite new. For example, much greater attention was paid to the problems of women and children heading households. Several groups focused specifically on the physical and emotional trauma of women survivors. And in contrast to the past, rural programs gave increased attention to the roles of women as agricultural producers and breadwinners for their families. Provision of shelter became a popular activity for many of the organizations, because of the need and because funds were available for building houses. Such projects were a significant departure from activities of the past. Also, in post-1994 Rwanda, some women's organizations tended to be (in practice if not official objectives) ethnically homogeneous. But this is a politically sensitive issue—not something people would speak about openly.

Confronting Rural Poverty: Shelter, Livestock, and Agriculture

Assisting female heads of household and other vulnerable groups to repair damaged houses or build new ones became an important activity for several national Rwandan women's NGOs, as well as for some local women's NGOs (such as Duhozanye in Butare) and for mixed groups involved in rural development initiatives. The emphasis on shelter was promoted by the government and supported by significant funding from multilateral donors (such as UNHCR) and several international NGOs. The women's associations involved in such projects saw housing as an important first step for women in rebuilding their lives. A woman with no place to live can hardly be expected to support herself and care for her children—much less have the confidence and wherewithal to participate in community activities.

Shelter projects were also meant to reduce social tensions, by providing lodging for "old caseload refugees" who, having returned to Rwanda after the genocide, were occupying other people's homes. Such considerations were important for donor projects and for the postgenocide government. They were confronted with the overwhelming tasks of rehabilitating and reintegrating 800,000 exiles ("old caseload refugees") who had returned from outside Rwanda in 1994 and 1995, as well as accommodating more than a million "new caseload refugees" who returned from the refugee camps in the Congo and Tanzania at the end of 1996 and in the early months of 1997.

In addition to these considerations, the government had another agenda—a policy of attempting to transform rural settlement patterns.[24] According to this policy, all new housing construction is to be sited in village settlements, called *imidugudu*.[25] This controversial policy was not open to discussion, as far as the government was concerned. Despite reservations based on experience with "villagization" elsewhere in Africa (programs that in virtually every case have entailed substantial coercion), many donors went along with this policy. Given the urgency of the postgenocide situation and the nature of emergency relief aid, the imidugudu policy did not receive the careful scrutiny and study that such a massive program for social engineering would normally undergo.[26]

By 1999, villagization had come to be accepted government policy.[27] Thus, Rwandan women's NGOs and international NGOs involved in building houses had to work within the limits of the imidugudu policy. However, the projects organized by Rwandan women's NGOs were often able to avoid some of the problems associated with the villages constructed by international NGOs and other donors. In some cases, the organizations were able to negotiate with local authorities to build houses on individual sites near a road, rather than in rigidly defined conglomerations.[28]

In addition to shelter, women's NGOs also sponsored programs to distribute small livestock (pigs or goats, in particular) to women and vulnerable groups and to aid grass-roots organizations to improve agricultural production.[29] Programs to distribute goats carried out by Women in Transition (WIT) and by Rwandan women's NGOs (some of them with assistance from the Rwandan Women's Initiative of UNHCR) contributed to women's and children's well-being by increasing agricultural yields and improving women's social standing. "A person who has a goat is *someone* in the local community" was a common refrain heard during the fieldwork.

Microcredit Lending, Community Development, And Promotion of Income-Earning Activities

The most visible national women's organization working in the area of microcredit is Duterimbere. In addition to granting small loans and guaranteeing larger loans, Duterimbere holds training programs for loan applicants and organizes workshops on management of small business endeavors. To enhance its credit activities, the organization recently established a savings and loan cooperative, the Coopérative d'Epargne et Crédit Duterimbere.

Seruka is another Pro-Femmes member that provides microcredit to rural and urban women. The organization has had good success in repayment by rural women. But it has encountered difficulties in obtaining repayment from urban loan recipients, an indication of the difficult economic conditions that poor women in the capital face. Seruka, Réseau des Femmes, and other associations also sponsor training for rural women's organizations, and they provide advice, technical assistance, and resources to help promote income-earning activities.

WIT's programs of assistance in agriculture and petty trade require recipients to repay loans, but without interest. In WIT's early phase, recipients initially were expected to repay 80 percent of what they had received. The repayments were then put into a fund the commune used to assist orphans. Later recipients repaid 100 percent.

From April 1999, WIT-funded associations have been making repayments to the women's communal fund that each commune has been encouraged to establish, as part of a program by Migeprofe to encourage microcredit for women. These funds charge a modest interest rate (usually 6–8 percent) for their loans.

Advocacy: Legal Aid and Workers' Rights

Several organizations that emerged in Rwanda after the genocide seek to promote women's rights.[30] The oldest and most visible of these is Haguruka, which means

"stand up" in Kinyarwanda. Haguruka tries to educate women and children about their rights and help them plead for redress in the legal system. Jurists the organization employs provide legal aid at Haguruka's center in Kigali, helping women sue. To extend the reach of its activities, Haguruka obtained funding from the Rwanda Women's Initiative of UNHCR to train 36 paralegal trainers. Working within the framework of Haguruka's Mobile Legal Clinic, the paralegals are providing legal aid in prefectures outside Kigali and training others to do this type of work.

Haguruka also has lobbied for revision of the inheritance laws, which discriminate against women. The proposed legislation, to which Haguruka provided input, will give daughters the right to inherit land and property from parents and widows the right to inherit from a deceased husband. This legislation is urgently needed, given the large number of female-headed households and the lack of secure access to land or property these women face under current law. In 1998, for example, by far the largest proportion of cases that Haguruka dealt with concerned rights to property and inheritance.[31] Yet passage of the new inheritance law has been painfully slow. In mid-1999, the bill had still not received legislative approval, despite significant pressure from groups in Pro-Femmes.[32]

Women's rights as workers are another important advocacy area. Though wage earners constitute only a small minority of the Rwandan population, labor issues are nevertheless of concern. Often a single employee supports a large extended family. This is especially true for women wage earners, and since 1994 the needs are even greater. Many women feed, clothe, and house significant numbers of children (their own and orphans they have taken in) on meager salaries.

The Conseil National des Organisations Syndicales Libres au Rwanda (COSYLI), a trade union organization with both men and women members, includes women among its leading officers and has attempted to raise public awareness about the problems women employees face in the public and private sectors. To promote this objective, in 1998, COSYLI organized four informational seminars—two in Kigali and two in Gikongoro—which brought together government officials, employers, and women leaders and employees to discuss the conditions and obstacles women workers face.[33]

In 1999, COSYLI leaders were particularly concerned about the dismissals of workers from government service in connection with austerity policies agreed on by the Rwandan government and multilateral financial institutions. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the dismissals may have targeted older women, although by mid-1999, COSYLI had not been able to obtain systematic data on this. Concerned about the economic repercussions against older women laid off from work (especially since such women often provide support to many children), COSYLI was pushing for transparency and public discussion about the criteria to be used in dismissing public service employees.

Promoting Girls' Education

Amid concern over the rising illiteracy rate among women in Rwanda since 1994, several Rwandan women's organizations have centered their efforts on educating girls. In March 1999, FAWE, Pro-Femmes, and Migeprofe organized a series of workshops and media programs to raise awareness about the importance of girl's education. In another initiative in 1999, Réseau des Femmes and FAWE, working with the newly created Association of Women Students at the National University of Rwanda, launched a research program to determine why girls drop out of school and to develop an action program to sensitize girls and their parents about the importance of girls' continuing their studies.

Vocational Training and Civic Education

Among the 35 member organizations of Pro-Femmes, at least 18 carry out some sort of training program. Both older and newer associations engage in such activities, which vary depending on the particular concerns of each association. Réseau des Femmes, for example, has organized gender sensitization programs for government authorities in rural areas and civic education programs and workshops on how to run viable organizations for women at the grass-roots level. Haguruka has organized workshops on women's legal rights and how to defend them.

Many Rwandan organizations support vocational training, an activity that has increased substantially since 1994.[34] Imparting useful skills to disadvantaged women is a major emphasis for Umushumba Mwiza/Le Bon Pasteur. This residential center, established on the outskirts of Kigali in 1985 by a Catholic prayer group,

provides year-long vocational training and psychological support to women in distress. The center staff is proud that they achieve a 70 percent success rate in finding employment for their trainees.

Umushumba is well established. But because it lacks adequate resources, it cannot expand to meet critical needs. Another, newer organization founded since the genocide, the Association des Femmes Chefs de Famille (AFCF) has very limited resources and yet still provides useful services for women and children heads of family.[35] To assist young women whose studies were interrupted by the conflicts, the AFCF is struggling to launch an ambitious training program in computer skills.[36] While waiting for additional donor support, AFCF has set up a typing service and school-supply store to generate revenues to keep the organization afloat.

Health Services, Trauma Counseling, And HIV/AIDS Awareness

As in vocational training, the activities of women's organizations in the area of health have helped meet an important need. At the national level, two of the member NGOs of Pro-Femmes primarily address health concerns, while at least eight others give some attention to health. Such initiatives are important in a context where government programs are woefully inadequate. Moreover, while helping women with physical ailments and trauma counseling, these associations also provide spaces where women can meet to overcome loneliness and attempt to rebuild a sense of community.[37] Even these useful programs, however, fall short of meeting the huge need. Moreover, urban women are generally more likely than rural women to find access to assistance.

One particularly successful urban-based initiative is the Kigali-based Polyclinic of Hope, which helps widows and women victims of sexual violence. Jointly established just after the war and genocide by Rwandan women returning from outside the country and women who had been living in the country, this effort offered medical treatment and solace to women who had been brutalized in the conflicts. Initially funded by Church World Service, the polyclinic later received funding from the WIT program and other donors. By 1999, the Polyclinic of Hope had broadened its activities to provide the services of a doctor and a pharmacy for women and to support two groups that meet weekly. One of these groups brings together Tutsi survivors of the genocide. The other consists of Hutu women who have lost husbands or other family members in the conflict and who are economically vulnerable. The weekly meetings impart great solace and support to members of each polyclinic group. As one woman explained, "Before we came here, most of us were confused and disoriented. We would sit in our own place and cry. When we came together, we began to smile again… . This is because of the group; when one comes here, it's like going to visit one's family. We are happy to be together and share friendship."

In addition to helping women with health needs, the polyclinic has launched programs to provide housing to members[38] and (with assistance from WIT) to make small loans available to women engaged in petty trade. Thus, although the polyclinic originally emerged to address one critical problem (health and trauma issues), the association has since enlarged the scope of its activities in response to the broader concerns of its members. Many women's organizations in contemporary Rwanda have experienced a similar pattern of growth.

Resolving Conflict, Empowering Women, And Fostering Peace

Like many other efforts centered on women and gender in postconflict Rwanda, the Pro-Femmes Campaign for Peace was responding to and building on initiatives at the grass roots where women were coming together to help each other and work out ways of living together again. In concrete terms, the Pro-Femmes program provided encouragement and assistance to women attempting to form associations, counseling services for women and children traumatized by the conflicts, public education campaigns in the media, and training programs to promote tolerance and reduce conflict. In November 1996, UNESCO recognized these activities by honoring Pro-Femmes with the Mandajeet Singh Prize for Tolerance and Nonviolence.

2. Factors Affecting Performance And Impact of Women's Organizations

We have seen in chapter 1 that Rwandan organizations are rich, varied, and growing. Women are well represented and visible—not only in organizations that exclusively or mainly target women but also in many associations that include both sexes. At the national and local levels, such organizations can claim impressive achievements. Their activities respond to a broad spectrum of important needs: support and solace for widows and orphans; aid for women's income-earning initiatives; vocational training and adult education; assistance with small livestock, improved seeds, and agricultural programs to increase yields; health services and trauma counseling; advocacy for women's rights; and promotion of girls' education. These efforts cannot be expected to overcome poverty. Strong, independent, and outspoken women's groups, however, can draw attention to specific problems that affect women and children, while providing resources that help individual women and groups confront these problems.

Alleviating suffering and assisting women in a postconflict context in getting back on their feet economically have been seen as a path to broader goals—a means to support women's political participation and to promote reconciliation. Here also, women's organizations in Rwanda have done a great deal. By the end of the 1990s, more women were participating in the public arena at the local level than ever before, thanks in part to associations that fostered such participation. At the same time, some women's organizations were helping women whose trust had been shattered to live and work together with others again—part of an incremental process of reconciliation. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain in efforts both to empower women and to improve their economic situation.

In trying to meet such challenges, Rwanda's women's organizations faced a number of obstacles, briefly described here.

Social and Cultural Factors

In the colonial period and still today, women have found it difficult to own land and property in their own right because of societal and legal constraints.[39] Historically, a woman's knowledge and abilities in Rwanda often went unrecognized, and her access to resources was usually controlled by men—her father, brother, husband, or husband's brothers—or, if she were a widow, by her sons. A corollary was that, in general, a woman's status derived from the status of her husband or brothers. Thus, some upper class women could still achieve public visibility and leadership.[40] Today, though women's dependence on men persists in different ways, it is still true that proximity to powerful men is an important political asset for women who wish to exercise leadership.[14]

In the past, Rwandan women normally remained silent in the presence of men and acted as if they knew little. Yet behind the scenes, sisters, wives, and mothers often had a good deal to say, and they were sometimes listened to. Moreover, collaboration and cooperation among women in Rwanda have long historical roots.[42] The public reticence of women was changing by the 1980s,[43] with their organizational activities taking a more assertive public stance. These changes, especially visible in the 1980s and early 1990s, were spurred by the economic needs of women at the grass roots in rural areas, by educated urban women in the expanding political space opened by political liberalization, and by the changing role of women in religious organizations (such as Catholic prayer groups, which served other purposes as well).[44]

Thus, Rwandan women's organizations during the 1990s have built on previous collaboration among women. However, while attempting to combat and redress the subordination of women in Rwandan society, some organizations still (perhaps unconsciously) reflect cultural values that tend to perpetuate social inequality and invidious distinctions among women.

One such cultural value is that if a family member steals or harms another person, the family as a whole is responsible for restitution. This attitude resonates today in the treatment of women whose husbands died in the Congo or whose husbands are in prison. There sometimes is a tendency to assume that if a man was involved (or suspected of involvement) in the genocide, his wife shares blame. In rural areas, such women are sometimes

shunned and marginalized by local government authorities—and even by local women's organizations. But in some areas of Rwanda, women's organizations have attempted to combat this by including wives of prisoners among their members.

Another example is proper clothing, an important marker of social distinction. A woman lacking "decent" clean clothes might hesitate to go out in public, much less speak out on community issues.

A third issue is the varied life experiences of women in Rwanda after 1994. The return from exile of many women born outside Rwanda or who had left when they were young has energized women's associations, bringing new ideas, dynamism, and energy to their activities. But this cultural mix has also spawned competition. As one woman leader commented, "If only there hadn't been the genocide." Some women who returned from exile have more advanced educational qualifications than women who completed their studies within Rwanda.

Political Factors

It is useful to consider four political factors that affect women's organizations in contemporary Rwanda in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways. First, an important consequence of the war and genocide is that ethnicity has become more important in Rwanda, despite the announced intentions of the government to abolish ethnic distinctions.[45] Few Rwandans will talk about ethnicity openly (at least not with outsiders). Yet in Rwandan politics today it matters what a person's (presumed) ethnic background is, where that person lived in Rwanda, and where that person came from if he or she is an exile who came home after the genocide. Understanding these distinctions can be critical to understanding the dynamics within and among women's organizations. Although Rwandan women have displayed a remarkable capacity to transcend differences and work together, distinctions based on ethnicity, class, region, place of origin, and life experiences remain salient.[46]

Second, the Rwandan state is now, as it was in the past, unusually hierarchical, with a tradition of top-down decision-making and little tolerance for people or groups who challenge the hegemonic discourse of those in power. Although the people holding power in Rwanda have changed since the war and genocide, these features have not.

Third, "clientelism" permeates Rwandan politics—both internally and between the Rwandan government and external donors. Having a well-placed patron is often critical to political survival and to the ability of a person, agency, or group to obtain resources. This is not, of course, unique to Rwanda, but it has been an enduring (and especially powerful) element of the political landscape. There is a perception among some of the smaller (and less well-funded) NGOs that leaders of groups connected to politically well-placed individuals (often men) are more likely to succeed in obtaining funding or other resources. Although many women's organizations are without such connections, anecdotal evidence suggests that several national women's NGOs are led by women with ties to politically important men.[47] The research team was unable to study this in depth; more data would be needed before drawing firm conclusions on the subject.

Finally, the nature of public discourse also influences the activities of women's organizations. The postgenocide regime in Rwanda prides itself on encouraging open discussion of issues. Government officials point to the recent elections for local councils at the commune, *secteur*, and *cellule* levels as evidence of a commitment to popular participation in governance. There are many topics, however, on which people do not feel free to express themselves.

Dependence on International Donor Support

Women's organizations in Rwanda receive criticism for their heavy dependence on donors for funding.[48] It is true that the need for donor support influences how groups set priorities, implement projects, and evaluate their activities. This dependence should be placed in context, however. Some organizations have tried to raise funds locally to support their activities.[49] But few of the national women's organizations would be able to survive on such income alone. For most national women's organizations in Rwanda, and many at the local level as well, dependence on international funding is an unavoidable reality.

The almost total dependence of women's organizations on international funding has obvious adverse consequences. International donors' tendency to shift their priorities year to year makes it difficult for women's organizations to undertake long-term planning. Even

when they carefully design a long-term initiative, they are under constant threat that it may abruptly close. Moreover, as the magnitude of humanitarian and development assistance declines, donors are withdrawing from funding and ongoing programs, creating problems for women's organizations. This has created a feeling of vulnerability among women leaders.

Problems of Cooperation And Coordination

Pro-Femmes was founded in 1992 as an umbrella organization to coordinate women's associations. The initiative came from several Rwandan women leaders, who saw benefits from collaboration and coordination. Donors also favored such an arrangement because it facilitated their efforts to assist women's organizations, without having to deal individually with many separate groups. After the genocide, Pro-Femmes reemerged. In 2000 the organization remained an important nexus for communication and collaboration. The collective action of member groups in support of the legislation to give women inheritance rights is a good example of this. Member associations of Pro-Femmes are aware of the strength found in numbers.

In addition, as an umbrella group for distributing funding from donors, Pro-Femmes has attempted to coordinate the activities of its member associations. This coordination is loose and not always effective; some duplication of activities occurs.[50] Though some duplication is understandable and probably even necessary, it tends to perpetuate distinctions.[51] Problems arise when there is competition over resources, often shaped significantly by the play for power within the postgenocide regime.

Women and Political Empowerment

Donors, the Rwandan government, and women's groups have put considerable emphasis in their public statements on the need for women to transcend divisions and work together to reconstruct Rwanda. Such a viewpoint is reflected in a 1997 UNICEF assessment: "The associative movement is an exceptional opportunity to reinforce women's role both in general and in the specific framework of reconstruction, development, and the promotion of peace."[52] Overall the results of the fieldwork support this assessment. Working together in groups has enabled a significant number of women to take on formal political roles at the local level. Associations have provided opportunities for women to gain experience in leadership and to express their concerns in public arenas. Incremental steps also have been made toward reconciliation in some areas because participation in the common activities of their organizations has helped women find ways to live and work together again. An overview of these efforts is provided in this subsection, which concludes with a discussion of some uncomfortable realities about power and policy in postgenocide Rwanda—realities that present obstacles to efforts to promote women's empowerment and societal reconciliation.

The 1997 UNICEF report issued a strong critique of women's underrepresentation in local government structures:

> Female representation at a peripheral level is practically nonexistent. Yet it is at the local level that the promotion of women must be concretely realised. A change is thus urgently needed at the communal level and beyond. The government's decentralisation projects that aim to reinforce local bodies (at prefectoral and communal levels) will have to improve female representation.[10]

In 1998, as if in response to this critique (but also spurred by women's initiatives in Gitarama Prefecture), the Rwandan government began a process of electing women's councils at the local level.[53] These 10-person councils, each elected at the level of the *cellule*, *secteur*, commune, and prefecture, are supposed to provide an opportunity for local women to have a say in issues that affect their communities—such as health, education, and development. The local women's councils also are to manage the newly introduced women's communal funds and serve as local representatives of Migeprofe. Moreover, women are also well represented in the separate structure of local government councils elected during March–May 1999. On many councils, women constitute 50 percent or more of the councilors.[54]

Although women have apparently made gains in obtaining formal participation in decision-making at the local level, it is still unclear which issues these councils will be allowed to address and how much autonomy they will have from government officials at the commune and prefecture levels. Also important will be the leeway for council members to raise concerns emanating from the

local community. For the present analysis, it is notable that many of the women elected to these councils had had previous experience as leaders or members of women's organizations or mixed organizations.[55] Clearly, the activism of women at the grass-roots level, as well as government and donor encouragement of the women's organizations movement, has opened political space for women's participation in public arenas.

It is laudable that women do have opportunities to participate in local decision-making, through the seats reserved for women on local government councils and in the structures of women's councils. The proliferation of government councils, however, presents some difficulties for organizations. Specifically, by co-opting much leadership talent into formal government structures, government is in danger of taking over space that could (or should) be occupied by civil society groups. What effect will this drain of leadership have on attempts by Rwandan organizations to strengthen civil society? We know from studies elsewhere in Africa that women active in ostensibly nonpolitical associations can wield important political influence at the local level.[56] Women need to be well represented in formal positions in government structures. But strong women's organizations must also serve as an alternative to state power, especially in the Rwandan context where government has not yet earned trust at the local level.

The question of autonomy for women's organizations is timely. Despite recent moves toward granting more responsibility to communes and prefectures, the Rwandan government is still highly centralized. A few men at the center make most important decisions. As of 1999, even though the number of women in key decision-making positions was greater than it was during the Second Republic,[57] women were still seriously underrepresented in this area.

Challenges for the Future

The literature on state and society in the third world posits a synergistic relationship between state and society; an effective, legitimate state is, ideally, based on strong civil society institutions that can counterbalance state power.[58] This type of relationship does not currently exist in Rwanda. Whether it can develop depends on several factors. Especially important are the degree of unity among women's groups and the attitude of influential government officials. In this regard, two concerns merit particular attention. The first involves the broad role of the postgenocide Rwandan government in supporting women's organizations and women's initiatives. The second involves questions of which policies are open to public discussion and influence.

In terms of the involvement of government in promoting women's organizations, it is important to recognize that support from Migeprofe has been essential for the success of many of the initiatives supporting women's organizations.[59] Moreover, the relationship between Migeprofe and donors such as WIT has been positive overall. Yet support can be double-edged. It may also entail (or augment) control. It can make women's groups vulnerable to withdrawal of support if a group or individual happens to displease those in power. Also, while Migeprofe may work well with outside groups at present, a government ministry (especially one with significant external support) is susceptible to changes in leadership. How such changes will affect organizations cannot be predicted. Thus, it is not desirable that government structures expand to absorb all of the existing political space. If women's organizations are to grow stronger and if civil society is to be strengthened, then not all donor aid to women's initiatives should be funneled through government channels.

A second major challenge facing advocates of gender equity and women's advancement in Rwanda lies in the realm of policymaking. Ordinary citizens or even leaders consider certain issues sensitive and closed to discussion in civil society. Often these issues could significantly affect women's lives, the legitimacy of the government, and possibilities for peace and reconciliation. Will women be present to discuss such issues? Will the expanded political space that allows for women's participation in some spheres (such as local government concerns) permit debate and real input by women on other issues that could greatly affect their livelihoods and opportunities for economic security? Will these be viewed as political concerns, open to debate, or will they be defined as "technical" questions, which only particular (primarily male) government decision-makers may decide?

Endnotes

[1] Staffed by educated young women trained as social workers, these centers encouraged rural women to meet and discuss common concerns. Despite a patronizing emphasis on helping women be better homemakers, the social centers did promote collaborative interaction between rural women while providing opportunities to grow vegetables and engage in income-earning activities such as raising small livestock. Moreover, the foyers also served as an arena where women could share their experiences and develop their own initiatives. Not all the support and encouragement came from outside. Much more was locally generated, in a manner somewhat subversive of the top-down assumptions of such foyers. In some areas, more elaborate productive enterprises were established. In the 1970s, for example, a successful women's cooperative at Mibirizi (in Cyangugu Prefecture) produced passion fruit and sold its juice.

[2] School ties linked these women together, as most of the social assistants working in the foyers sociaux had been trained at the Karubanda social-work school in Butare. At the same time, these women had their horizons broadened by the experience of traveling far from home to work in rural areas in different parts of the country. They felt a strong esprit de corps from their shared experience of receiving low pay, living together in government-supplied housing (which also served as office and meeting space), and doing challenging work. They also acquired valuable experience and leadership skills that positioned them for employment in other domains later—whether in government service, local NGOs, or international NGOs.

[3] Adding to their traditional social services of medical work, education, and social services, during this time the Catholic, Protestant, and Adventist churches also encouraged community organization and rural development. This was supplemented during the 1980s by increased foreign assistance, including contributions from youthful expatriate volunteers wishing to promote rural concerns.

[4] Inades Formation Rwanda, "Inventaire O.N.G. 1985" (Kigali: UNICEF, 1985), pp. 17–18. This report, based on a 1985 survey of 133 groups, expressed concern over "the relative lack of attention to the agricultural activities to assist women, given the [important] role of women in agricultural production in Rwanda." Many of the earlier efforts to support rural women tended to reinforce women's subordinate role in society; there was an emphasis on domestic responsibilities rather than agrarian, commercial, intellectual, or political activities. The report also found that although most of the Rwandan NGOs surveyed were linked with churches, the number of secular organizations was increasing. Noting a continued heavy dependence on financial resources from outside the country, despite some progress in raising resources locally, the report recommended increased efforts to increase self-financing. It also deplored the fact that Rwandans headed only about 36 percent of the NGOs surveyed.

[5] De Keersmaeker and Peart. *Women and Children of Rwanda.* P. 109.

[6] De Keersmaeker and Peart (p. 109) mention the first two of these factors. The researchers believe that external funding and support were also important.

[7] The name of the ministry has changed several times since 1994. This discussion uses the appellation that was current in 1999. Note that in early 1999, a reorganization and ministerial shuffle resulted in what had been the Ministry of Gender—the Family and Social Affairs being split into two: the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the (current) Ministry of Gender and Promotion of Women's Development.

[8] Most of these groups were small, with fewer than 20 members, and informal. Others were formally registered with the government. Groups of both types provided important services for women at the grass roots—assistance in income-earning projects, mutual support, and an arena where women could lobby for more attention to women's concerns. Some groups also played a role in reintegrating refugees. Observing that such groups were often involved in agricultural production and mutual aid in times of sickness, birth, or death, the report suggested that generating income was not the main focus for most of these organizations. See de Keersmaeker and Peart, 110.

[9] De Keersmaeker and Peart, 110. The Women in Transition program funded by USAID since 1996 played an important role in supporting such associations.

[10] One example of such a collective is the Conseil Constitutif des Femmes (COCOF) in Gitarama Prefecture, begun in 1994 to help widows and women whose husbands were in prison to establish associations. In 1999, COCOF's 2,055

members were grouped in 97 associations. Many of the member organizations were engaged in agriculture and small livestock projects; others produced handicrafts such as baskets, and some formed rotating credit groups. The intergroup has promoted cultivation of peanuts and soja, to improve soil fertility and family nutrition; members who receive seeds must repay in seeds, but they then keep the net yields for household consumption or sale. COCOF also maintains a store for members where they can obtain tools such as hoes and axes and inputs such as seeds, insecticides, and fertilizer. The organization has plans to expand its range of merchandise, but a lack of resources has hampered this initiative. Funds from member dues and donor assistance cover the salaries of the COCOF staff (which includes a trained female agricultural officer) as well as the costs of operating a vehicle for visits to member organizations.

[11] USAID was in the forefront on this issue, with the introduction of its Women in Transition (WIT) program at the end of 1996. Later programs for assisting women, such as the Rwanda Women's Initiative (RWI) of UNHCR, appear to have been influenced by the WIT approach. Both WIT and RWI worked closely with the Ministry of Gender and Promotion of Women's Development.

[12] The classic discussion of this is found in Audrey Wipper, "The Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organization: The Co-optation of Leadership," *The African Studies Review* 18, 3 (1975–76), pp. 99–120.

[13] Indeed, Pro-Femmes is proud of being a truly national association: "The organizations [that] compose it work in all areas of socioeconomic activity and in all the prefectures of the country, serving the population at the grass roots." Collectif Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, "Campagne Action pour la Paix (Janvier 1997 à Mars 1998)" (Kigali, November 1996).

[14] Having lost much of its personnel during the genocide, Duterimbere was under new, less experienced leadership in the immediate postconflict period. Flush with large donor inputs, the NGO moved away from its earlier emphasis on assisting people of modest means, and approved large loans to urban elites. Many of these were not repaid on schedule. When loan recipients defaulted, Duterimbere's financial viability and credibility with donors plummeted. To save the NGO from imminent collapse, some board members joined with association members to demand changes in personnel, a reorganization of the association, and more stringent financial policies and procedures to ensure proper use of funds. These changes and the self-study, which called for a recommitment of Duterimbere to its foundational ideals, have strengthened the association. Like Réseau des Femmes and Haguruka, Duterimbere owns its own building. But in 1999 the organization was having trouble finding tenants who could pay rent for space in the newly constructed second story of the building. Without rental income, Duterimbere found it difficult to meet payments on the debt incurred during construction.

[15] This organization conducts activities of both an emergency and long-term character, including health care and trauma counseling, repair and construction of housing, encouragement for income-earning activities, aid to grass-roots associations, training for development, and advocacy for justice and commemoration of victims of the genocide. The association, currently occupying rented quarters in Kigali, hopes to construct a building of its own, with space for a training center.

[16] In addition to houses, Asoferwa's Village de Paix Nelson Mandela includes a primary school, a health clinic, a grinding mill, a workshop for tailors, a center for literacy training, a market, and a reservoir. The organization has drafted ambitious plans for further expansion at Ntarama, with additions for a dairy, a tannery, a health center, and a guest house. As of 1999, however, a lack of funds had delayed implementation of these projects.

[17] The association lost several of its leaders in the massacres, and some fled the country. The association's offices were destroyed and its office equipment looted.

[18] For example, lacking a vehicle, Seruka's staff members use public transportation to reach the rural sites where their projects are located. This is in distinct contrast to a group such as Asoferwa, which employs four chauffeurs to drive its vehicles. Members' dues and interest income from microcredit initiatives provide some income for Seruka, but this is insufficient to cover the core funding needs of the association. Despite such constraints, from 1995, Seruka carried out a variety of projects with the help of modest assistance from donors. Examples include provision of small loans to women for petty commerce or agricultural production, a model house-building project (repair of 30 houses and construction of 40 new houses at Rutongo in Kigali Rural Prefecture), the establishment of mutual savings funds in three prefectures (Gikongoro, Gitarama, and Byumba), and help with school fees and school

materials to orphans of the war. Other examples include the organization of training sessions on gender and development, several projects to assist agriculture and distribute small livestock, a beekeeping project, and a vegetable cultivation project. Like many of the organizations that responded to a survey conducted during fieldwork, Seruka had drafted plans for additional projects it wished to undertake, but the lack of funding prevented the organization from implementing them. One of the projects envisioned was to provide assistance to returnees from the refugee camps in Congo and Tanzania. It is troubling that funding for such an evident need was not forthcoming.

[19] In concert with several other women's NGOs, this organization is conducting research on why girls drop out of school at a higher rate than boys. FAWE/Rwanda has emphasized the importance of education of daughters, and to this end has championed the establishment of single-sex secondary schools for girls. The first of these was to open in September 1999 in Kigali. FAWE also planned to establish such a school in each of Rwanda's other 11 prefectures. In 1999, FAWE's projected budget increased to $70,000, up from about $10,500 in the previous year. The news report on this did not mention the source of funding. See "70,000 USD Earmarked for FAWE/Rwanda Chapter," *The New Times* (3–9 May 1999).

[20] Of many such organizations, two—IWACU and RISD—are noted here as illustrative examples. IWACU, founded in 1981, with legal recognition obtained in 1984, is dedicated to supporting and expanding the cooperative movement in Rwanda. Its operations were suspended during the genocide but resumed in 1996. IWACU provides technical support and loans to cooperatives and runs a well-organized center in Kigali that gives training sessions and seminars for people involved in the cooperative movement. The IWACU director in mid-1999 was a woman, as were several of its administrative cadre. Included in the goals of the organization is a commitment to providing training to women and girls involved in groups or associations. [See "Do You Know IWACU?" (Kigali, IWACU, n.d.).] Another such group, the Rwandese Institute for Sustainable Development (RISD), founded after the genocide, aims to ensure that women's concerns are taken into account in planning for development. Although RISD's concerns are not limited to women's issues, the organization includes women among its high-level staff. In 1999, RISD was monitoring and attempting to shape the ongoing debate over government plans to introduce land reform in Rwanda. RISD wanted to ensure that women's needs and rights would be addressed in the legislation and policies to emerge from this process.

[21] This was not, however, the first time women in Rwanda had spoken out for peace. In 1992, Rwandan women, regardless of class, ethnic status, or political affiliation, joined together in the Women's March for Peace to protest a violent attack against Agathe Uwilingiyimana, who was at that time minister of primary and secondary education. (Uwilingiyimana, a Hutu, was later to become prime minister; on 7 April 1994, she was one of the first officials killed during the genocide.) Participants in the Women's March for Peace also demanded that the government bring an end to the war that had ravaged Rwanda since October 1990, with its severe effects on women's circumstances and family livelihoods.

[22] The program was formally adopted by the member associations of Pro-Femmes in 1995, in discussions that formed part of the preparation for the Beijing conference in August of that year. The project was revised and elaborated on during the subsequent three years.

[23] Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, "Mieux Connaître le Collectif Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe," pp. 7–8.

[24] Most rural dwellers in Rwanda live in scattered homesteads, with their houses surrounded by the intensively cultivated gardens in which they grow food and other crops for family subsistence and sale. Household waste and manure from small livestock and cattle (for those fortunate enough to have cattle) are used to fertilize crops, particularly the banana groves that shade homesteads in most areas of the country. Traditional Rwandan belief holds that the "smoke from the cooking fire of the house" keeps banana groves healthy. Bananas are important both for food and for making banana beer, a significant source of income for rural households and an essential part of everyday social relations and rituals such as marriage, death, and birth.

[25] The singular is *imudugudu.*

[26] Dorothea Hilhorst, Mathijs van Leeuwen. "Imidugudu: Villagisation in Rwanda: A Case of Emergency Development." *Disaster Sites,* no. 2 (1999), The Netherlands: Wageningen University.

[27] From the viewpoint of the postgenocide government and survivors of the genocide, concern for security is an essential consideration driving the imudugudu policy. Grouping the population into villages is seen as necessary to protect people from the violent incursions of guerillas (génocidaires and opponents of the current regime) who in the years after the genocide attempted to topple the fragile new government. Critics accept that "villagization" was perhaps justifiable in the eastern prefectures. There, large numbers of exiles from the Tutsi Diaspora (the "old caseload refugees") had returned to settle after the genocide. Then, at the end of 1996, hundreds of thousands of returnees from the refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania flowed back into Rwanda. There was an undeniable need to find ways to provide housing and arrange for field sharing. In the late 1990s, however, this policy was extended to the northwest (Gisenyi and Ruhengeri), where conditions were different.

[28] A shelter project sponsored by WIT in Rusumo Commune encountered such flexibility on the part of the bourgmestre, as did a WIT-funded house-building project in Rukara. Giribambwe, one of the member NGOs of Pro-Femmes, built houses in Gitarama with funding assistance from WIT. For other examples of villages constructed by Rwandan women's NGOs, see "Mieux Connaître le Collectif Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe," p. 10. Among the cases cited are the Nelson Mandela Village at Ntarama built by Asoferwa and a village of 180 houses in Kigali Rural Prefecture built by Benimpuhwe. The Benimpuhwe project will permit the relocation of members from the city to live in the village. Examples of other projects include the following: Benishyaka built Umutara village; Duhozanye built a village in Shyanda, Butare Prefecture; Seruka built a village at Kabuye; and Sevota built a village at Taba.

[29] Programs to distribute goats usually involved a grant of sufficient funds to an association to purchase half the number of goats as there were members of the group. Later, when the goats produced offspring, each association member who had received a goat in the first round was required to give a female offspring to another association member who had not yet received a goat.

[30] Among other member associations of Pro-Femmes that list legal advocacy or legal assistance to women among their activities are the Association Rwandaise des Femmes des Médias (Arfem), Benishyaka, Dukanguke, Fondation Tumerere, and Icyuzuzo. In addition, as part of an effort to inform women of their rights, Asoferwa has undertaken research on the roots of conflict in Rwanda, and Avega has sponsored research on violence against women during the genocide.

[31] Haguruka, "Rapport Annuel 1998."

[32] Haguruka and other members of Pro-Femmes lobbied in favor of the legislation, which the minister of Migeprofe presented before the Parliament in March 1999. Although officials said the legislation would soon be voted into law, as of mid-1999 the bill was still under consideration.

[33] Cosyli, "Rapport du Séminaire."

[34] Without more sustained study, one cannot adequately ascertain the full extent of such activities. However, many organizations include vocational or other training among their stated activities; in most cases, such training is carried out in combination with other activities. Some examples of training programs conducted by various member NGOs of Pro-Femmes include the following: the Association Rwandaise pour le Développement Social gives training to orphaned girls who have been unable to continue secondary school studies, the Association Rwandaise des Travailleurs Chrétiens/Section Féminine provides instruction in tailoring, Benimpuhwe trains peer educators (youths and women) to help prevent sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, Benishyaka organizes literacy programs for women, and Caritas–Umuhoza provides technical training to single and vulnerable women. In addition, Fondation Tumurere supports the training of vulnerable children and Rwandan youths to help them be "patriotic and entrepreneurial"; Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne Féminine provides training to grass-roots women's groups in agricultural and pastoral activities, artisanry, and commerce; and Urumuli Rw'Urukundo provides training to its members and to orphans in how to conduct successful income-earning activities.

[35] The organization was founded in 1994 by 20 women survivors of the genocide. An average of three women a day come to the Association des Femmes Chefs de Familles (AFCF) requesting assistance; AFCF helps those it can and refers others to health clinics and other programs where help can be obtained.

[36] With help from Pro-Femmes, the United Kingdom, and several other donors, AFCF set up a modest office in the commercial center of Kigali and by mid-1999 had obtained seven computers. Before beginning its training pro-

gram, the organization still needed funds to rent classroom space and acquire furniture. It also required additional computers to train 20 students at a time. To obtain this additional funding, AFCF had applied for a loan from the Survivors' Fund, an institution set up by the government to provide assistance to survivors of the genocide and massacres of 1994.

[37] Examples of such activities include the following: The Association Rwandaise pour le Bien-etre Familial aims to promote family health by supporting family planning, sexual and reproductive health, and the health needs of women and children. The association organizes educational programs for adults and youths on responsible parenthood and balanced family life. It also collaborates with the government, NGOs, and other donors to increase public awareness about family health issues. Another association member of Pro-Femmes, SWAA/Ihumure, promotes awareness about AIDS among women and sponsors AIDS-prevention programs. Benishyaka includes among its programs psychosocial counseling for victims of sexual violence and for traumatized children. It also sponsors campaigns to encourage family planning. Several other groups, such as Avega, Agahozo, and Rwandese Women Helping Orphans, also provide women victims of sexual violence with trauma counseling, health services, or both.

[38] Once the Polyclinic had obtained registration as an NGO, it was able to obtain funding to provide houses for some members; others were still waiting as of mid-1999. The group had been promised assistance from the U.S. government for construction of 80 houses for its members, and once the prefet of Kigali allocated plots, building was to begin. In the meantime, those without a house were renting small rooms, where they usually lived alone.

[39] A good example of this is the fact that in colonial and postcolonial Rwanda, agricultural extension agents (who were almost all men) ignored the broad, deep knowledge women possessed about soil conditions, different types of seeds for food crops, and optimal cultivation techniques. Additionally, although women do most of the work in coffee production, for example, coffee has been seen as a men's crop. An excellent analysis of the situation of rural women in postcolonial Rwanda is found in Danielle de Lame's *Une Colline Entre Mille ou le Calme Avant la Tempête: Transformations et Blocages du Rwanda Rural* (Tervuren: Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, 1996). On the tendency of government agricultural officials and development programs to ignore the knowledge of women farmers, see Johan Pottier's "'Three's a Crowd': Knowledge, Ignorance, and Power in the Context of Urban Agriculture in Rwanda," *Africa* 59, 4 (1989), pp. 461–477; and Joachim Voss's "L'amélioration de la culture de l'haricot sur la base d'un diagnostic des contraintes de production, des pratiques et des potentiels des agriculteurs," *Les projets de développement rural*, A. Nkundabashaka and J. Voss, eds. (Butare, 1987), pp. 37–47.

[40] Thus, in precolonial Rwanda, upper-class women (for example, royal wives and wives of chiefs, large landowners, or cattle owners) often presided over their own coterie of subordinates (clients), to whom they would distribute cattle to create ties of loyalty and service. One of the most famous of such women was Kanjogera, a wife of the notorious King Kigeri Rwabugiri, who reigned during the last quarter of the 19th century. After Rwabugiri's death in 1895, Rutarindwa (son of one of Rwabugiri's other wives) took the throne as the legitimately installed heir. Kanjogera and her brothers Ruhinankiko and Kabare, however, staged a coup d'état in 1896, killing Rutarindwa and his supporters and then installing Kanjogera's young son Musinga on the throne. Kanjogera's ruthless wielding of power has entered into the lore of Rwandan political discourse. During the Second Republic in Rwanda, the politically active wife of Juvénal Habyarimana, the military president who himself had taken power by a coup d'état in 1973, was often referred to in popular parlance as "Kanjogera."

[41] This is hardly unique to Rwanda. But it is a consideration for (informal) qualifications for obtaining and maintaining leadership in women's organizations in contemporary Rwanda. It is also relevant in a society with a high percentage of female-headed households and an assertive administrative penetration at the local level.

[42] In the past, girls forged close ties as adolescents when they engaged in all-female meetings in which they learned about proper sexual behavior of adult women. The young people involved in these groups often remained close friends and confidants well into adulthood. Sometimes this was extended to religious participation as well, within both traditional and Christian religious practices.

[43] Catharine Newbury, "Rwanda: Recent Debates over Governance and Rural Development," *Governance and Politics in Africa,* Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton, eds. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992), pp. 193–220.

[44] This activist trend was brought to a head in 1989, when a former woman member of the MRND Political Bureau was killed in a suspicious automobile accident. It was widely believed that she had been liquidated because of her

outspoken critiques of government policies—especially on issues important to women (e.g., government corruption). Many women took notice and commented on her death [*Dialogue* (1989)]. Given the nature of the conditions under which she died, few in Rwanda believed this was an accident; most saw it as a political assassination.

45 The main distinction is between Hutu and Tutsi, but these are not corporate groups, and there are often significant differences within each. For example, among those seen as Tutsi, there are important differences between those who have always lived within the country and those who returned from exile after the genocide. Among those who returned from exile, it matters whether one formerly lived in Burundi, Congo, Tanzania, Uganda, or elsewhere. Among those seen as Hutu, there remain important historical and political differences between Hutu from northern Rwanda and Hutu from south–central Rwanda.

46 Such divisions are not always easily visible to outsiders; nonetheless, they can affect the internal structure and functioning of women's associations as well as the extent of cooperation and coordination between them.

47 There is anecdotal evidence of some organizations dismissing one or another employee or leader who was less politically well connected than a rival. Such rivalries sometimes take on an ethnic character or involve competition between women who returned to Rwanda from exile and women who had lived all their lives in Rwanda. This type of competition is not surprising, but it can undermine efforts to achieve unity and solidarity, and it affects how associations are perceived by ordinary people. Political considerations may also influence an organization's access to resources, especially in cases in which a government ministry is able to control who will benefit from external aid.

48 De Keersmaeker and Peart, 110.

49 For example, many of the women's organizations at the national and local levels obtain income from dues paid by their members. In addition, some organizations sponsor income-earning activities, such as selling clothes tailored by trainers and trainees in a vocational program for seamstresses, renting meeting space owned by the association, obtaining interest from loans made to women's groups, and taking donations of consultant fees from consultants volunteering their time to the association.

50 For example, the fact that there exist several organizations to assist widows in postconflict Rwanda could be seen as a duplication of efforts, but, as explained in an AFCF document, there is a convincing rationale for this: "[AFCF] . . . was created by the initiative of 20 widows, survivors of the Genocide and the Massacres of 1994. We wanted to get out of our isolation and work together to fight the poverty of our families, poverty due to the loss of our husbands and our children and the pillaging of our belongings during the genocide. Other groups that existed at the time had their objectives. In Rwanda after the genocide, there were 500,000 widows [sic], and it was practically impossible to resolve their problems through a single organization." AFCF, "Renseignements concernant Notre Association" (8 August 1998, typescript).

51 There are several reasons for such duplication of activities. First, as noted, Pro-Femmes grew from 13 member associations in 1992 to 35 member associations after the war and genocide. The rapid proliferation of organizations made coordination more difficult and duplication of some activities inevitable. Second, many of Pro-Femmes's member associations obtain separate funding from donors apart from the funding funneled through Pro-Femmes. Third, the crisis conditions in postconflict Rwanda led some associations to expand into new activities to meet critical needs. A corollary to this was that to obtain project funds associations found it necessary to reshape their activities to fit what donors were willing to support. Finally, different associations that engage in similar activities tend to serve different constituencies—women of different backgrounds, ethnic categories, and experiences during the war and genocide.

52 De Keersmaeker and Peart, 110.

[53] Elected women's councils were first introduced in Gitarama Prefecture in September and October 1998 (see Ephrem Rugiriza, "Démocratie: á l'école des femmes de Gitarama," *La Nouvelle Reléve*, no. 370, 30 octobre 1998, p. 6). The councils were then extended to the rest of the country through elections held during the second quarter of 1999. The queue system of voting used for the women's council elections and other local council elections in spring 1999 involved voters lining up (in public) behind the candidate of their choice. Although the Rwandan government and some expatriates have praised this form of voting as democratic, the lack of a secret ballot has been sharply criticized by some observers both inside and outside the country.

[54] On each local government council, 4 of 10 seats were reserved for women candidates. In addition, women were elected in significant numbers to council seats that were open to both men and women.

[55] For example, the rural umbrella group COCOF, in Gitarama Prefecture, estimated that two thirds to three fourths of the women elected to local councils in communes COCOF served were members of women's associations connected to COCOF. Co-optation into government service of talented leaders in the NGO sector is also an issue at the level of central government institutions. In May 1999, the executive director of Haguruka was elected to serve on the new Human Rights Commission established by the central government; her predecessor had left Haguruka after being named secretary general in Migefaso (later, *Migeprofe*). Mixed associations also face this issue. Leaders of Imbaraga, a national organization for farmers, were pleased that many of the Imbaraga leaders at the local level were elected to councils at the levels of the cellule, secteur, commune, and prefecture. This created something of a leadership crisis, however, because the bylaws of the association prohibited combining leadership in Imbaraga with government service.

[56] See, for example, Aili Mari Tripp, "Expanding 'Civil Society': Women and Political Space in Contemporary Uganda," *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 36, 2 (July 1998), pp. 84–107.

[57] For example, whereas women constituted about 11 percent of the National Development Council (parliament) of the Second Republic, in 1999 women held 20 percent of the seats in the transitional parliament of the postgenocide government. Whereas in the past there had been one woman minister, in 1999 there were two. Also in 1999, there were more women secretary generals (the position just below the minister) in the ministries than there had been under the Habyarimana government.

[58] Joel S. Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Ahue, eds., *State Power and Social Forces: Domination and Transformation in the Third World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[59] Both the former and the current minister of Migeprofe have strongly encouraged other parts of the government and international donors to address women's concerns. At the commune and prefecture levels, Migeprofe and its predecessor have demonstrated a commitment to improve women's economic situations and promote their equality. They have often served as crucial intermediaries in directing assistance to vulnerable groups. For example, the WIT program has benefited in important ways from a synergistic relationship with Migeprofe. After the former Ministry of Gender, the Family and Social Affairs was divided into two separate ministries in February 1999. The Migefaso representatives at the commune level remained under the new Ministry of Social Affairs. Henceforth, the principal formal connection between Migeprofe and the commune level was to be through the Women's Communal Fund in each commune and the newly created structure of women's elected councils.